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Colloquial Names of Maine Plants

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As all my early life was spent in Maine, I grew up to hear constantly certain folk-lore names of plants, and while Britton and Brown mention many in foot-notes, some I have never seen nor heard elsewhere. From early childhood I was always asking the names of plants.

The curious *Equisetum arvense* might not attract every child's attention, but it did mine, and its universal name was "*Gunbright*"* because it was used to brighten the metal parts of guns, as well as pewter. Not until many years later did I know it as "*Scouring Rush*."

All the *Lycopodia* were "*Evergreen*," *clavatum*, *complanatum*, *obscurum*, being the most common. *Abies balsamea* was never *Balsam Fir*, but always "*Fir Balsam*."

Picea canadensis was called "*Skunk Spruce*," and many a Christmas celebration in a hot school-house was marred by its odor. The *Sagittaria* in the brook (*variabilis* in those days), was never called anything but "*Waxflower*."* *Andropogon scoparius*, a grass growing in thin, sterile soil was thought to "run out" and impoverish the soil, hence the name "*Wolf grass*,"* "*Poverty Grass*."* *Agropyron repens* was "*Witch Grass*," (*Wire Grass* less commonly); *Lemna minor*, *Frog-spit*; *Veratrum viride*, "*Poke root*"; *Lilium Philadelphicum*, "*Freckled Lily*,"* and children were warned not to look into them lest they also freckle. *Clintonia borealis* was "*Wild Lily of the Valley*,"* as were *Pyrola elliptica* and *rotundifolia*, and Dwarf Solomon's Seal and *Spiranthes cernua*. *Smilacina herbacea*, always "*Jacob's Ladder*"; *Sisyrinchium*, "*Blue Grass*," (not *Blue-eyed*'). *Cypripedium acaule*, "*Valerian*"* and "*Nerve-root*," and much esteemed as a

* The names so indicated, are those which I never heard elsewhere, nor do I find the name occurring elsewhere except as noted.

nerve-sedative, collected and used by the nervous. (In Western New York, all the Indians call the *yellow* Lady's Slipper, *Whip-poor-Will's Shoes*.) The Poplar was "*Popple*," the American White Birch, the "*Gray Birch*." *Rumex crispus* was "*Yaller dock*," and the root one of the constituents of a spring tonic. *Polygonum Convolvulus* we knew as "*Wild Bean*."* *Amaranthus retroflexus* was always "*Borax*,"* why I do not know; but "*Red-root*" was never heard. *Phytolacca* was always "*Garget*" given in B. & B., and used for cows which had garget. *Portulaca oleracea* was "*Pusley*," as it is everywhere. *Caltha palustris*, always "*Cowslip*," and valuable for "greens" in the spring. *Coptis trifolia*, "*Canker-root*" was used for children and adults with canker-sores or facial eruptions. *Raphanus Raphanistrum* was invariably "*Charlic*"; *Sarracenia purpurea* was often "*Fox-glove*," as well as "*Pitcher Plant*." *Sempervivum tectorum*, "*Live Forever*," "*Bag-plant*"* (because the children blew up the leaves), and "*Aaron's Rod*."* *Saxifraga pennsylvanica* was used as greens, and never called anything but "*Wild Beet*."* *Spiraea tomentosa*, used as a country remedy for dysentery, had no name but "*Wire-bush*."* *Potentilla canadensis* was "*Little Buttercups*"; *Pyrus arbutifolia*, "*Choke-pear*";* *Amelanchier canadensis*, "*Sugar-pear*."* *Prunus serotina*, "*Rum Cherry*,"—rum was added and the cherries left in the bottle, the liquid used in dysentery. *Trifolium arvense*, "*Pussy-foot Clover*,"* and *T. hybridum*, "*Pink Clover*."* *Apios tuberosa*, "*Chocolate*"* (name from the color of the flowers); *Impatiens fulva*, "*Snap-weed*."* *Euphorbia Cyparissias*, "*Cypress*"; *Rhus Toxicodendron*, "*Markry*," ("*Mercury*" less often). *Ilex verticillata*, "*Holly*"; *Nemophanthus mucronata*, "*Dogberry*";* *Malva rotundifolia*, "*Cheeses*" universal name; *Aralia nudicaulis*, "*Sassafrilla*." *Cornus canadensis* "*Bunch-plum*"; *Chimaphila umbellata* was "*Noble Pine*" (Britton & Brown give this) and "*Pyroly*." *Kalmia augustifolia*, "*Lambkill*." *Gaultheria procumbens* always was "*Ivory Plum*." The late black *Gaylussacia baccata* is always "*Stony Huckleberry*."* (a good name). *Lysimachia quadrifolia*, "*Liberty-tea*," (we were always told it was so-named because this plant was used to avoid tea-taxes). *Nepeta glechoma*, "*Robin-run-away*," "*Gill-go-over-the-ground*"; *Hedeoma pulegioides*, "*Penny'yal*." *Mentha canadensis*, "*Brook-mint*"*; *Physalis* (probably *heterophylla*), "*Husk tomato*." *Plantago major* was

"*White man's Foot*," (said to have been so called by the Indians) because it was found everywhere man went, even around the old logging camps. *Galium asprellum*, "*Clivers*" (*Cleavers*), "*Kidney-vine*,"* used in kidney troubles by the country people. *Viburnum dentatum*, "*Withe wood*" *Moose-wood*. *Lobelia inflata*, "*Indian Tobacco*," "*Puke Weed*,"* used in asthma. *Eupatorium perfoliatum*, "*Boneset*," a great remedy in the country. *Lacinaria scariosa*, "*Devil's Bit*." Asters were "*Frost flowers*,"* and *A. cordifolia* was known as "*Tongue*"* and used as greens. *Erigeron annuus* was called "*Little Daisies*."* *Antennaria* was "*Indian Tobacco*" or "*Pussy Toes*." *Bidens frondosa* was "*Beggars' Lice*"; *Achillea millefolium* was "*Nosebleed Plant*"; *Anthemis Cotula* was "*Stink weed*,"* "*Pig-sty Daisy*."* *Chrysanthemum Leucanthemum* was "*White-weed*"; *Rudbeckia hirta* was "*Ox-eye Daisy*" and "*Yellow Daisy*;" and *Chrysanthemum Balsamita* was "*Rosemary*."* *Artemisia Abrotanum*, *Southern-wood*, "*Old Man*," "*Old Woman*," a sprig of which was carried to church and to funerals. *Artemisia vulgaris*, "*Motherwort*." (*Artemisia absinthum* was used as an application in sprains.)

Many herbs were saved and used in the household which I learned later are valuable in medicine.

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